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ABSTRACT

The paper briefly describes Project PADRES (Parents and Auxiliary Development Resources in Education Services), a program designed to create a partnership between parents and school representatives in order to improve educational services to limited English proficient students; and discusses parent involvement with the school. To create the partnership between the school and the community, both must be willing to plan and implement an effective communication system. To provide bilingual students with meaningful educational programs, the school and the community must make a commitment to the goals and priorities mutually set by the school, community, and the parents. Implementation of activities is the final ingredient for meeting the needs of the bilingual child. (SB)

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT

"The Key to Quality Education"

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INTRODUCTION

Parents of bilingual children are parents of exceptional persons. The bilingual child's command of two languages demonstrates concretely that bilingualism is an asset and not a liability. In a home environment where parents reinforce the value of bilingualism the child develops a positive self-concept which must also be nurtured at school.

As educators we must admit that the learning/teaching process can not take place if the child does not respond to the stimuli which lead to motivation. We must also recognize that verbal and non-verbal communication is the means by which a message/information is related between two human beings. If the aforementioned hypothesis is acceptable, then the link between the home and the school can more readily be deemed important and crucial in the education of the exceptional bilingual child.

Parental involvement in the development and implementation of quality programs becomes even more important when the child's abilities, aptitudes, aspirations, and skills are accepted as more than just a means to an end, that end being the acquisition of the English language. While we must admit that a major objective of any school language arts program should be a course of studies whereby a child becomes literate in English, it is also as important to recognize that to maximize the potential of an individual is not to stop with language acquisition. The exceptional bilingual child is a product of an enriched environment which influences his/her self-image in a positive manner.

Parents would not allow bilingual education to cease as a result of their child's reclassification if they really understood the detrimental

effect which such an abrupt transition can have on a child's self-image, feeling of self-worth and perception of his/her environment. More emphatically stated, if a child is stripped of his/her roots at an early age s/he is also robbed of opportunities to be himself/herself and develop abilities which could be utilized to contribute positively to society, a society which is wasting a very valuable natural resource, the exceptional bilingual child.

Parents are currently beginning to recognize that bilingual education should not be a dead end street which starts in kindergarten and ends in third grade (or when the child acquires literacy in the English language). They are becoming knowledgeable of the learning process, the techniques, and the methodology of instruction that contributes to quality education. Advocacy groups, community leaders, and organizations are becoming more involved in helping schools develop master education plans, curricula, and school improvement processes which address the needs of the exceptional child, the bilingual child.

Project PADRES (Parent and Auxiliary Development Resources in Education Services) is a program of the Bay Area Bilingual Education League, Inc., a non-profit corporation. The focus of PADRES is the relationship between the school and community. Our primary goals and objectives are to create a partnership between parents and school representatives in order to improve educational services to limited English proficient pupils. Parents develop their leadership and advocacy skills while principals and counselors learn more about how to improve services through equal educational opportunities.

The basic difference between PADRES and other projects designed to strengthen educational programs is the approach. Historically the school has sought the underlying reasons why parents do not participate

actively in their children's school activities and historically parents have relinquished their responsibilities as mothers and fathers (loco parentis) to the school. When asked who is to blame, parents accuse the school, and the school accuses the home. PADRES accuses both for lack of communication, for lack of commitment, and for lack of action.

The approach which PADRES proposes and utilizes is one through which the parent, the counselor, and the principal verbalize the needs, make commitments, and initiate action toward common goals and objectives. The main focus is to provide children access to quality educational programs.

PADRES will share with conference participants the methods and techniques whereby a true partnership can be created between the school and the community. A cooperative assumption of responsibilities provides a viable means for the exceptional bilingual child to reach his/her "outer limits."

It is not too late for our nation to promote cultural pluralism, acceptance, and respect of individuals regardless of their race, creed, or color. The exceptional bilingual child can and will have equal educational opportunities as parents become involved and are genuinely accepted in the educational decision-making process. PADRES is a witness to the fact that in schools where parents and school personnel work together, the services students receive are improved and, furthermore, the child excels. Parent involvement is the key to quality education.

PADRES provides training, information, on-site technical assistance, and follow-up to participants. Communities in the Greater Bay Area and San Francisco area are developing and implementing positive solutions to age-old problems. We would like to share our experiences with you.

I. COMMUNICATION

In order to create the partnership between the school and the community, both must be willing to plan as well as implement an effective communication system. Per definition, communication is defined as a system of sending and receiving messages or giving and receiving of information (Webster, 1960). Although simple to understand, this is the most neglected component of the educational process.

Parents and school personnel do not talk with each other, they talk at each other. Much too often they are too busy "casting stones" at each other instead of listening, comprehending, understanding issues, problems, or concerns. Compounding the shortcoming which has been cited, one must also take into consideration the bilingual abilities or lack of bilingual abilities of the parties mentioned. Finally, to complicate matters even more, it is important to address other factors such as the following:

1. The school's philosophy of bilingual education;
2. Individual philosophies of bilingual education;
3. Racism;
4. Discrimination;
5. Local, state, and national trends in bilingual education.

Given the aforementioned factors plus reports which substantiate the shortcomings of our public schools in the areas of curriculum, student placement, personnel, and counseling it is not difficult to understand the complexity of providing quality education to the bilingual child (Towards a Quality Education for Mexican-Americans, 1974).

Furthermore, the public has had to respond to its responsibilities more affirmatively since the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the May 25 Memorandum, the Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1974, and the Lau v. Nichols Supreme Court Decision of 1974.

The communication of human rights, inalienable rights and effective teaching/learning processes are major considerations in establishing a sound quality education program. Herein lies the complexity of communication! School districts cry out for local control, parents demand programs that meet bilingual children's needs, and the resulting curriculum only reflects the minimum mandates of statutes. The bilingual child, this exceptional human being, is consequently regarded as a non-person, a robot.

The importance of self-concept as it relates to learning becomes lost in the maze of power plays between the school and the community. The school board makes decisions based on the influence of pressure groups, imposed societal norms, and popular "band-aid" solutions which cover problems but do not resolve them (Desegregation and Hispanic Students: A Community Perspective, 1980).

Parents, on the other hand, have been desperate for so long that they'll settle for any program which even "smells" of bilingual-bicultural education. Historically, the public school has not met the needs of the bilingual child; therefore, anytime the school system agrees to implement even a token five to ten minute oral communication program which utilizes the child's first language the community overwhelmingly supports it, not knowing the long-range consequences (AIR Report, 1978). The net result is another setback for bilingual education, an uneducated, frustrated child, a school board which eliminates the program with a "clear" conscience of fulfilling its responsibility, and a community who reacts angrily, after-the-fact, to an environment which echoes the message that the "bilingual" program reflected the community's desires. Little, if any, mention is made to the lack of sound teaching/learning practices.

Effective communication can address the programmatic needs identified by parents, teachers, and other decision-makers if the information imparted between the responsible parties is complete, is comprehended, is understood and utilized to plan educational programs which impact the short-range and longrange

objectives for the bilingual child, an exceptional individual who continues to survive in spite of the barriers that are encountered on a daily basis.

II. COMMITMENT

If the school and the community manage to communicate effectively and if both are willing to explore alternatives solutions, to explore innovative programs, and to assume necessary responsibilities, the bilingual child may eventually benefit from meaningful educational programs. The word commit is defined as to pledge; find; to bring together, or to promise (Webster, 1960). Obviously Webster is utilized as a resource to assure effective communication and operate from a common interpretation of terminology. When partners make a commitment and adhere to the mutual agreements reached the child benefits (Research Evidence for the Effectiveness of Bilingual Education, 1978). In every case where bilingual children have had access to a meaningful and appropriate education they have made substantial academic progress, have had the opportunity to nurture and enhance their self-concept, and have disproved the myth that bilingual education is un-American, fattening, immoral or illegal.

Parent and community involvement in the educational process also creates healthier school and community environments. Adults learn about cultural pluralism, children accept and respect each other, school personnel perceives individual differences as positive realities, and school boards make adequate commitments ($$$) which support an integrated program of studies, (Demystifying the Concept of Culture, Theoretical and Conceptual Tools, 1978). Incorporation of a responsive program will not happen automatically. It must be well planned, effectively implemented, and thoroughly evaluated for best results (Planning for Multicultural Education as a Part of School Improvement, 1979).

Parent Involvement in school activities must also be planned. Needs should be assessed, priorities must be set, and corresponding activities must reflect the goals and objectives mutually set by the school and the community. Trust, cooperation, and responsiveness alleviate the apprehensions that individuals or

groups are being "used" to "rubber stamp" "pre-packaged" programs (Meeting Parents Halfway, A Guide for Schools, 1972). Another key concern of all community members is student discipline, the predecessor to the prevention of crime, a major societal problem. A psychologically healthy student grows up to contribute positively to society instead of becoming a burden to the public. Therefore, as the school and the community become more effective in meeting pupils' needs, discipline problems become minimal and more energy can go into the teaching/learning process (Parent and Community Involvment: Rx for Better School Discipline, 1980).

The bilingual child must have access to an environment where s/he is accepted, loved, and valued, an environment that respects the whole person, not only the linguistic capabilities and abilities. The charge for educators and community members is a commitment which requires the willingness to do what is right and not what is popular.

III. ACTION

The last ingredient for meeting the needs of the bilingual child is action. Once again our friend Webster is a recognized source for defining this six letter word which is so often verbalized and is so little actualized. Action is the doing of something, being in motion or operation, behavior, conduct, an act or thing done (Webster, 1960).

Communication, commitment, and action are the three main components of impact. Mutual communication, individual commitments, and implemented activities contribute to the accomplishment of established goals and activities (Improving the Human Environment of Schools: Problems and Strategies, 1979). Throughout the foregoing pages the emphasis has been on making appropriate educational decisions for bilingual children based on facts, needs, priorities, goals and objectives and evaluation.

The partnership between parents and school representatives does not take place overnight nor does it happen by one or the other rationalizing or justifying shortcomings with unexcusable excuses. A true partnership is developed through an on-going process of two-way communication, access to information, mobilization of resources, and the elimination of the word "can't" from one's vocabulary (Parent and Community Involvement in Bilingual Education Programs, 1980).

Although school boards will continue to make the final decisions which dictate educational activities, the parents of bilingual children can participate effectively, not passively, if they are recognized as sources of knowledge, expertise, experiences, and technical assistance. As parents learn more about the three R's, curriculum, the law, their rights, their children's rights, and the potential of the community to respond to its own needs, schools will become healthier environments for the bilingual child (Knowledge as Power, 1980). As school representatives realize that the school is a part of the community and not apart from the community it will become much easier to develop the "link"

which will improve the quality of education the bilingual child receives.

Instead of parents blaming the school or the school blaming the parents, each assumes its responsibilities and actively strives to fulfill its commitments. Individuals improve what they currently are doing, complement their efforts with additional activities, or modify their plan of action based on formative and summative evaluation.

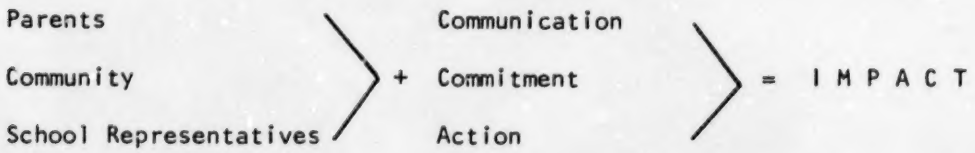
Action takes effort, communication is not easy to achieve, and commitment is a principle (Parenting in a Multicultural Society, 1980).

Let us not forget the chicken and the pig who were walking past a community center. The chicken observed a sign which in large boldface letters attracted attention: "We serve breakfast to the needy, all contributions accepted". The chicken being a civic-minded individual stopped the pig and strongly influenced a joint effort. Th pig evaluated the situation quietly and then responded quite emphatically, "for you it's a contribution, for me it's total commitment."

Bilingual education is a total commitment which serves exceptional children, bilingual pupils. Language is an asset, not a liability. Moreover, let us not lose sight of our commitment to educate children by giving them every opportunity to reach their "outer limits". Our greatest natural resource is our children, tomorrow's future. Let's not blow it, AMERICA. Remember, action speaks louder than words.

IV. CONCLUSION

Instructional Programs for bilingual children or limited-English proficient pupils can meet the challenge if the parents, the community, and the school form the partnership that will respond appropriately to pupils' needs. Quality education can become a reality by utilizing the following formula:



It is not easy but it is not impossible!